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## A THIRTEENTH-CENTURY STATUE OF THE VIRGIN AND CHILD

THE thirteenth century is the golden age of French Gothic sculpture. It is the century of the greatest sculptures of Chartres and Amiens and Paris, and of ill-fated Rheims. It is the century of the unknown sculptor to whose master chisel we owe the statue of the Virgin and Child which has recently come into the possession of the Museum.

Anyone who is familiar with Gothic sculpture in the architectural setting for which it was designed, knows only too well that such sculpture, removed from its original surroundings and exhibited in a museum gallery, loses not a little of its charm. This is particularly true of thirteenth-century sculpture. In the Romanesque period, architecture had overshadowed in importance the sculpture which adorned it; in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries conditions were reversed; but the cathedrals of the thirteenth century exhibit a perfect and harmonious union of the two arts. In this great period, the sculpture is an integral part of the architecture, and the sculptor's problem was the creation of a decorative ensemble rather than the execution of single figures intended to be self-sufficient and designed without reference to their eventual use.

The visitor must keep this in mind when he stands before the statue recently purchased by the Museum, and now exhibited in the gallery of Gothic art on the second floor of Wing J. Let him forget the other objects around him, and try to visualize this gracious statue of the Virgin and Child as it might have been seen by those for whom the artist worked. Let him imagine, perhaps, the deep-set portal of a church, where, against the trumeau which separates the two doors through which the faithful enter into the house of God, might stand the statue of the Virgin, supported by a high pedestal and surmounted by a canopy. On either side, the sculptor may have added figures of holy personages and saints, and, in the tympanum above, scenes from the history of Our Lady. Such would

have been the scheme of decoration in one of the great cathedrals. It was not so elaborate, of course, in the lesser churches. Wherever our statue may have been shown, we may feel confident that it was designed for a definite place, and that it formed part of an ensemble to which both architect and sculptor had contributed.

But let us return to Gallery II:J13. The statue which engages our attention is approximately life size, measuring  $62\frac{1}{2}$  inches in height. It is carved of stone, probably from the same stone as was used in the construction of the building whence it comes. The surface of the stone has not been elaborately worked. Here and there, indeed, the marks of the chisel are still visible. This reminds us that it was customary in the Gothic period to paint and gild sculpture. A thin coat of plaster covered the stone and upon this color and gilding were applied. Our statue still retains traces of its polychrome enrichment. The effect was further enhanced by the use of cabochons of colored glass. These simulated gems ornamented crowns and brooches and the borders of garments, as one may see on the Museum statue, although in this instance most of the cabochons are now missing from their settings. In other respects, however, the statue is in marvelous condition, untouched by the restorer's hand.

The Virgin stands on a low hexagonal base, her body bending gracefully as she supports on her left arm the Christ Child, who raises His right hand in blessing, while in the left He holds an orb, the symbol of His majesty. A veil covers the Virgin's head; a crown indicates her royal rank. Over her gown, girdled at the waist and falling in long folds to her feet, the Virgin wears a mantle tied with a tasseled cord. One end of the mantle is drawn across her body and gathered up under her left arm. On her breast is a jeweled brooch. The little Christ Child is dressed in a loose gown with long sleeves—by no means a picturesque garment, but one which had this advantage for sculptors who were unfamiliar with the forms of children, that it successfully concealed most of the person.

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VIRGIN AND CHILD (DETAIL)  
FRENCH, XIII CENTURY

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VIRGIN AND CHILD  
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The pose of the figures is marked by a feminine, aristocratic grace, but this quality is epitomized, as it were, in the expression which illumines the Virgin's face. In the tender, serene smile with which the Virgin looks down at her baby, there is nothing of the cold austerity of the earlier Madonnas of the Romanesque period, nor of the merely pretty domesticity, too intimate sometimes for the dignity of the theme, which characterizes the later Gothic versions of the Divine Mother. In the art of the thirteenth century, the Virgin descends from her throne to earth, although she still wears her royal crown and forgets not the dignity which pertains to her high rank as the Queen of Heaven and the advocate of sinful man at the justice seat. If she permits herself to smile upon her child and to carry Him in her arms as any mother might, still she is ever mindful that she is blessed among women, and her love is spiritualized by reverence.

In the expression of this exquisite modesty of affection, our sculptor has been eminently successful. Equally successful is his solution of artistic problems. He simplifies form and movement until alone the essential, significant facts remain. Emphasized in this way, these truths are comprehended so readily by the spectator that an extraordinary impression of reality results. We have still to note another aspect of the artistic performance, the achievement of abstract beauty. Here we are not concerned with religious thought or with truth of representation, but with pure design. This is the beauty of rhythmic lines, of harmonious shapes, of the infinitely varied manifestations of order in design. This quality of abstract beauty, which characterizes Gothic art of the great period, is present to an unusual degree in the statue recently acquired by the Museum.

The statue may be dated toward the close of the thirteenth century. Its similarity in style to the *Vierge Dorée* of Amiens, and the fact that the statue, which for several years has been in private possession, came originally from the neighborhood of this celebrated cathedral, would

indicate that the sculptor was strongly influenced by the ateliers of Amiens. Sculpture of this period, particularly works of the highest order, are so rarely available that the Museum may be congratulated upon the acquisition of this masterpiece of French Gothic sculpture. A recent writer<sup>1</sup> has said, "A beautiful thing may be self-luminous with pleasure; or it may also glow with pleasure reflected from its truth or its morality." One would have to search far to find a more perfect illustration of this definition than the statue of the Virgin and Child which has occasioned these notes.

J. B.

## DRAWINGS BY LEONARDO DA VINCI ON EXHIBITION

IN Gallery 25 the Venetian and Bolognese drawings have been replaced by other drawings from the Museum collection. The present exhibition is chosen from the schools of Parma, Milan, and Genoa, and one wall is given over to the school of Raphael. Among these is the back of a nude man by Raphael himself, made during his stay in Florence, one of the drawings given by Cephass G. Thompson in 1887. In the Genoese group the series of twelve brilliant drawings by Luca Cambiaso is worthy of comment, as are many others of the exhibit; but the chief interest will be found in the two sheets of drawings by Leonardo da Vinci which were purchased in 1917 and are now shown for the first time.

In all probability these have always been attributed to this master, but they were unknown to any of the prominent authorities and consequently do not occur in any of the lists. Since 1801 their history is traceable. On the folder in which they were kept up to the time of their mounting for exhibition is an inscription in French stating that they were given to J. Allen Smith by J. G. Legrand, May, 1801.<sup>2</sup> The drawings were owned

<sup>1</sup> B. I. Gilman. *Museum Ideals*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Souvenir d'amitié à J. Allen Smith par J. G. Legrand en floréal an 9*. No other information about either of these personages has as yet been found.